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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SOLIMAN ON ARAB LEAGUE IRAQ CONFERENCE VENUE

REF: GODEC-RICCIARDONE EMAIL DATED 01/28/06

Classified By: Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (S) Ambassador told EGIS chief Omar Soliman that we had heard that the AL was thinking of postponing its planned follow-up conference involving all the Iraqi factions, and of moving it outside Iraq. We could understand the need to postpone such a conference, particularly pending the formation of the permanent government of Iraq, but would urge the AL to hold the conference, if at all, inside the country. Soliman said he had heard that "the Iraqis themselves" had requested postponement and moving of the conference to outside the country, "so they could feel free and safe." He admitted that "the Iraqis" from whom he had heard this were from hardline Sunni factions, not the GoI itself. Soliman recognized that the GoI would prefer holding the AL conference inside Iraq. He indicated that he would support this, provided the Iraqis themselves were willing to do so.

2. (C) Separately, Arab League Secretariat Chief of Staff Hisham Youssef told poloff January 29 that the League would most likely await formation of a new government before proceeding with its reconciliation conference. There were no plans, he said, to move the conference venue outside Iraq despite press reports that "had originated in Iraq." Youssef added that Secretary General Moussa's envoy on the issue, former Sudanese foreign minister Ismail, would travel to Baghdad soon to explore the subject with the Iraqi government and other influential Iraqi political figures.
RICCIARDONE